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A Serbian's Vision of America

By

Bishop Nicholai

Bishop of Ochrida, Serbia

A Serbian's Vision of America

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FOREWORD

Bishop Nicholai has just returned to his diocese of Ochrida, in southern Serbia, after travelling for three months through the United States. He did not come to this country to ask for any funds or relief, and he has taken nothing material back with him. He told me the day after his arrival in New York that he had come to learn whether there exists in America that moral strength which should be the accompaniment of great physical strength. "If so," he said, "I will plead with America to spend it as generously in changing the moral misery of Europe as she has spent her wealth in helping Europe's physical misery."

In the following article Bishop Nicholai describes briefly what he has learned here. It is based on notes made during several long talks with him, as well as on a statement written by him for the New York Evening Post. It seemed to me that what Bishop Nicholai said regarding the world situation and the implications that would follow America's adoption of any long-continued policy of self-interest and attempted isolation could not be allowed to pass unrecorded. He comes of a race which is interested in fundamental causes; we are of a race which is interested more in the study of effects, in the accumulation of facts, in mapping out day-by-day action. Perhaps the realists of modern America can find something of value among a philosopher's objective ideas.

It is with the foregoing in mind that the present pamphlet has been printed for private distribution.

HAMILTON FISH ARMSTRONG.

128 East 36th Street, New York,
May 15, 1921.



A Serbian's Vision of America

WE Europeans have been living in the greatest imaginable anxiety to see what would be the first step of the new American Government, what substitute the new Administration would give the world for the League of Nations which it has rejected. Exhausted and crippled by the latest of many wars, we are afraid of new and worse things, in Europe as well as elsewhere, and yearn for some new institution to lead humanity towards peace. The idea of the League of Nations having been abandoned by America and misused by Europe, there remains at present only one organized system, living and working by day and night for its ends, and that is Communism. At the moment the chief propaganda argument of the Communists is that they are the only peacemakers, the only idealists, the only real workers, the only ones who are willing to go to all lengths in order not to see the world drift back to its old standards and habits.

What is there to do in this situation? If the League of Nations is not acceptable, what is acceptable? If Communism is the only scheme in existence to-day which is being pressed vigorously, we must organize another scheme to combat it. I am amazed that nobody seems to think it necessary to propose a substitute immediately. One cannot talk of isolation. In every high school there are clubs whose members make speeches about humanity and study international affairs. Over the doorway of one school in the West I saw written the legend: "For the Service of Humanity." The world has become small, but it waits to be proclaimed a united being. Europe has explored the world. Can America organize it?

Organization! Organization! is the watchword of our time, but few seem to guess that organization of anything must begin at the beginning—with the organization of my soul and yours. The great religious teachers are foolishly called idealists and dreamers. In reality they are the only practical men in history. They did not care for any social organization while they still saw the human soul disorganized. It is the patent of modern statesmen to try and build a house upon sand—to try and organize the twigs and leaves while at the root the tree stands disorganized and unbalanced. Nowhere in the world is there at present a full and harmonious manhood. On

the continent of Europe the Slavs are in the main dominated by the power of emotionalism, the Latino-Germans by the power of intellectualism, and the Anglo-Saxons by the power of will. Nowhere is there a harmony of the three. Can America be this harmony, this *pleroma* of manhood?

America is more than a nation. Technically speaking, it is pan-humanity, for all races and nations have a larger or smaller representation of their own blood and soul in this new organism. The Anglo-Saxon powerful will and stern morality are directing it. Yet America is not Anglo-Saxon. It is pan-human. After battling with each other at home, nations, embittered and exhausted, come to America, there to become friends and take up constructive work. That is why the world has been saying that America now is going to surprise them with some great new scheme, something more democratic and constructive than anything they have ever known, something more helpful, something more American. But the eyes of humanity are getting tired and dim looking for the coming of the good messenger from America. And instead we hear murmurs of safety and trade routes and mid-Pacific islands.

I divide the history of the white race into the history of three great "Internationales":

The first was the Roman, or Jupiterian. It was frankly an international system of subjugation and exploitation.

The second has been the European, or quasi-Christian. In actions it differs from the Roman hardly at all, but it is less frank in that it uses pleasant phrases as a cloak—democracy, and liberty, and even Christianity. Its words are the words of Christ, but its acts follow the law of Rome.

The third "Internationale" should be the American. It should come before the world with a new scheme. Christian principles have often been proclaimed, but never yet used as the basis for a concrete procedure, as the basis for all relations, both at home and with other nations. That is what we now must try, for otherwise I do not see the existence of the present civilization.

You ask what induces me to think that America can proclaim this new scheme and can force its trial. I say that spontaneously, instinctively, Providentially, this continent has been developing two main tendencies, Charity and Constructiveness, which are the modern forms of the deepest principles of Christianity. I am not blind to many American faults and by-tendencies. But since I came to this country I have been trying to find the main tendency, and that, I find, is very different from what it is in Europe. In Europe when we dislike our neighbor, when we are envious of the five-story house

which he has built to overtop ours, we go out and burn that house down; in America you try to build a ten-story house. Such is the European revenge, and such is yours. We, in Serbia, built a ridiculous small cottage. Austria looked at it enviously, and burnt it down. The same is true of Germany and France. Burn down!

I think I have demonstrated not only the need for a helpful constructive scheme but America's ability to evolve one and set it to work. So much for my introduction. Even if the proposal I am about to make is of no value it may at least spur better brains than mine to find a better plan than mine to oppose the peril that confronts us. Why not found a World Construction Committee, in the formation of which America shall take a leading part, but which two or three of the other most rich and powerful nations also should be asked to support, each setting aside for that purpose a certain fraction of its present war budgets? Perhaps the first three members might be America, England, and Japan. Let all of them divert an equal part of their war budgets from work of destruction to work of construction. Let their committee send out (as America has by herself sent out, though on an inadequate scale in view of the immense undertaking), engineers and doctors and financiers and builders to bring water to lands where no water is, to bring health to lands ravaged by disease, to bring financial order to lands disorganized and impoverished, to build up where all has been torn down, or where nothing worth building has ever been built. There is hardly a part of the world but has been exploited and crippled and is now reaching a stage of desperation and chronic dissatisfaction—Poland, Albania, Calabria, Armenia, China, Russia, Austria, Persia, Ireland, Senegal, Palestine, and the Congo, to mention just the first that come to mind. Turn the best thought of the world to the task of curing these festering sore spots, turn its best energies for once to something positive and constructive and practical.

I would not cut down the war budgets of the nations. I would turn them to better uses. Men must be taxed in order to be taught to give. It is very easy to teach men to be selfish and indolent; it is very hard to teach them to work and to be charitable. Since the world began men have been forced to give to war and destruction. They now should be forced to give to peace and construction.

A European gentleman who has spent some time in England discussing a great world political scheme has lately come to America. When he complained to me the other day that the United States is very materialistic, that the people over here will not listen to what he has to say, I told him that America knows only two things: Charity and business, or as Carnegie put it, the two G's—Get and Give.

Americans will listen if they are talked to along those two lines, but to purely political schemes they will pay very little attention, remembering that political schemes have ruined Europe and knowing themselves to be mere children beside the politicians of Europe. They are rightly wary of diplomatic wise men coming from the East.

But the scheme I propose is based on charity and business, both in equal degree—on charity, because the world needs help frantically and our civilization will die without it; on business, because thousands of men sent by thousands of firms and vast accumulations of material would go out from this country and the other producing countries to establish prosperity and health and a system of self-supporting work in all the waste places of the world. You say that politics would creep in. Undoubtedly it would try, but the world is waiting for some constructive action with an eagerness and impatience of which you can hardly conceive, and it would not tolerate political meddling once the scheme was proposed clearly and firmly.

Wilson did one great service at least. He introduced America to the world in a new and truer and better light. Had not America come to be seen in this new light there would not now exist in the world the great expectation and hope of which I have been speaking. If America had remained out of the war, if she had not come in for the reasons which she did, Communism would have swept across the world without let or hindrance. So, from the first, there has been this conflict between what I have called the idea of the American Internationale and the idea of Communism. The battle must not now be allowed to go by default, and that is what a return to the old European Internationale would be, because that system is finished and even now counts its last days.

Surely you are not going to resume the old rôle I used to hear assigned to America—"the dollar-making country." That would mean that you withdraw from the fight, leaving us nothing to hope in save the hopeless hope of Moscow. I do not believe you will do that. America is, indeed, a money-making country, but is not that far better than a money-saving country? An American makes money enthusiastically, but does he not just as enthusiastically give it away? In some other parts of the world one saves rather than makes money, which positively is a greater curse. The war has indeed discovered America in a new light. America helped to finish a prolonged slaughter (how many millions of human lives she saved by throwing away her fifty thousand!) and got no war booty. That is one thing. America prohibited drinking. That is another thing. America extended unprecedented charity indiscriminately to allies and enemies in order to help crippled Europe. Three feats, three

honors, three new revealed qualifications! Thereby she has deserved new attention from the five continents and a new definition.

What is this new definition of America? It ought to be: A pan-human society of men intoxicated with the constructive and charitable spirit. Those who say "we are tired of giving" do not speak as real Americans. On the old continent charity has had about the same meaning as tipping, but in America charity has for the first time in history become a seriously organized affair. Are you really tired? Are you tired, then, of being Christians? Your charity to all suffering nations has surpassed the charity of many other countries, but it has not yet surpassed your war budget. If the expenses of killing human beings are greater than the gifts for saving them, where, then, is charity? What is a penny given to Christ as to a dollar given to Mars? The poor widow in the Temple is still punishing Empires with shame.

After an earthquake, when your house catches fire, you cannot say: "I will now rest a little from the shock of the earthquake." America cannot rest, she cannot stop, she must go on—one way or the other, she must go on. She is at the crossroads. On one hand lies the way Europe has always gone—the negative, quasi-Christian way; the other is the way of human salvation, with new principles strongly affirmed, the way of charity and energetic constructive effort.

I am not proposing Utopia. It is not impractical to say that in a time of staggering need men should join together to meet that need. A healthy conception of life must be offered at once to oppose and offset the unhealthy and unnatural internationalism of Moscow. It must not be imagined that Bolshevism is altogether weak and negative. Bolshevism expresses, though stupidly, two things—the protest of men against the double-faced politics of Europe and the world need for a world policy. That cannot be fought by silence, by stunned brains, by a vacuum, but by proposing something better and by struggling and fighting for it continually.

In education patterns are more important than precepts. Napoleon and Bismarck and Lenin are all patterns—patterns of Kaiserism. Europe is not suffering from Kaisers, but from Kaiserism, and it can be cured only by a system based not on nations or classes or individuals, but on pan-humanity. Your providential task is to be a pattern of pan-humanity and a proponent of its principles.

The ignorance of the educated is a Chestertonian subject. It is a wonderful subject, but Chesterton is disappointing when he enlarges upon it because he does not know that the real ignorance, the fatal ignorance of Europe to-day, is that no positive scheme of life can be built upon the old, outworn negative procedure which rejects

Christianity as a motive force. I talked the other day with Tesla, the great scientist, who is also my countryman, and at the end of it he said: "I have studied all processes and all religions. The most practical scheme, the most practical religion, is Christianity." The most *practical*! There lies the real ignorance of the educated in Europe—they do not know that Christianity is a practical scheme, and have refused ever to try it. They have even failed to find practical words to interpret it. I think those words are the two words that America loves, Charity and Constructiveness—to do, to construct, to organize, to put in order, to give.

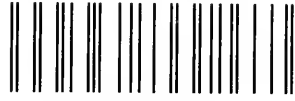
From what causes have races and civilization gone down except from extreme impoverishment or extreme prosperity? If Europe is in danger of perishing from the first cause, America is in no less danger of perishing from the second. Is she going to care for herself only, to attend to her own interests only, to enrich and strengthen herself still more, and in all these matters to imitate Europe? If so, then the end of the world is not before us, but before us, and humanity is not existing only in a Paradise lost, but in a Life lost, too.

Well, my vision of the future of America is different. America is not going merely to repeat Europe. The main tendency of America throughout her history has been to exceed Europe in every constructive work. In less than the span of a human life America has in this become a super-Europe. She is going to become a super-Asia also. The light of the East and the light of the West will rest at their noon on the continent which lies between East and West. The spirit of the East is of a synthetic and inner tendency; the spirit of the West is of an analytic and external tendency. America will be neither West nor East, but both in unity, a harmony of elevated emotional, intellectual, and will-power. The last-born child of History, like Joseph, is going to save all its brethren from starvation and despair. Therein lies America's glory and her own salvation.

BISHOP NICHOLAS



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